

COMMUNITY DIALOG ON GANG ACTIVITY AND REVITALIZATION IN THE HERITAGE/ANNANDALE AREA

Meeting 1 Summary

The first meeting of the Community Dialog on Gang Activity and Revitalization began at 5 p.m. on February 11, 2004, with Supervisor Bulova explaining how the Dialog would proceed. Each meeting would begin with a handful of speakers and would be followed by discussion. Citizen participation is essential – individuals who attend at least four of the five sessions will be eligible to vote on the final recommendations at the Dialog's conclusion.

After thanking certain individuals for being present, Supervisor Bulova explained that the Dialog's focus would be on the Heritage Drive corridor of Annandale. She wanted to make herself clear, however, that she is not trying to pick on Annandale; Annandale is just a manageable bite of this complex, county-wide problem. Braddock District School Board Member Tessie Wilson then spoke and said that we need to solve the problem of gang activity as a community and that she was very happy to see so many community members in attendance.

Supervisor Bulova then invited Sgt. Greg Smith of the Fairfax County Police Gang Unit to give a short presentation about the history of the gang problem in the Braddock District. Sgt. Smith first described the evolution of the police gang unit, which started as a "gang coordinator program" in 1993 and became a permanent unit in 1998.

In Fairfax County, 117 total gangs have been identified, but only approximately 50 of those gangs are consistently active. The county is also home to 1131 known gang-associated persons (with many more unknown persons), and the police initiated 837 gang cases in 2003. In Northern Virginia at large, police have identified roughly 400 gangs. Sgt. Smith explained that gangs are migrating from cities to suburban areas, so that no community is immune to gang activity.

Sgt. Smith explained that federal and state law enforcement officers have been working together to coordinate their efforts against gang activity. For example, the Tenth Congressional District Task Force, made up of police officers from across Northern Virginia, as well as the U.S. Department of Justice, is tasked with proactive suppression, education, and intelligence gathering.

Youths are lured to gangs through the promise of money, drugs, sex, adrenaline, and acceptance, said Sgt. Smith. Their mentality is very fatalistic, and revenge plays a big role. The crimes committed by gang members could include graffiti, drive-by shootings, robbery, assault, and even murder. Sgt. Smith explained the difference between "gang graffiti" and "tagger graffiti." Gangs use graffiti to mark their territory and list their members; generally it is not of the same "artistic" quality as tagger graffiti. Taggers use public spaces as their canvas and believe they are creating a form of art; this type of graffiti is not generally associated with gang activity.

Smith briefly described ways to identify whether someone is a gang member or not. He clarified that there are no definitive signs for which to look. Dressing the same way every day, wearing

bandanas, pulling up one pant leg, wearing a solitary color, or nickname tattoos can be signals that someone is associated with gangs.

Supervisor Bulova turned the floor over to P.D. O'Keefe of the Fairfax County Public Schools to give an overview of prevention efforts and intervention programs available in the county. O'Keefe said that the schools already have several resources in place, including the police, Community and Recreation Services (CRS), the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court, Fairfax Partnership for Youth, and outreach organizations like Barrios Unidos.

The schools also have other, internal programs in place, including a gang/bullying awareness program, conflict mediation, parenting workshops, and certain after-school programs. Additionally, parents' and students' responsibilities are detailed in the *Student Rights and Responsibilities* booklet distributed at the beginning of each school year.

O'Keefe said that the schools work with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court to coordinate prevention efforts, including a specially appointed probation officer for youths convicted of gang-related crime. CRS, he explained, runs several after-school programs outside of the schools and also has "community response programs" to work with a community when a gang-related incident is reported. Organizations like the Fairfax Partnership for Youth and Barrios Unidos run outreach programs and after-school programs to find young people alternative activities.

Supervisor Bulova explained the Dialog's syllabus and explained that a "Community Engagement," organized and facilitated by officials from the U.S. Department of Justice, is being planned for late April or early May. More details on the engagement will be forthcoming and will be explained at a future Dialog meeting.

Discussion of the Dialog's mission statement then started with Supervisor Bulova reading her draft. People in attendance expressed their desires for the Dialog's direction, including widening the area under examination, involving the entire community and "taking back" areas in which gang activity is prevalent.

The mission statement (see below) was revised and adopted unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 7 p.m. Supervisor Bulova reminded everyone that the next meeting would be held on March 10, 2004, at 5 p.m. at Braddock Elementary School.

**COMMUNITY DIALOG ON GANG ACTIVITY AND REVITALIZATION
IN THE HERITAGE/ANNANDALE AREA
MISSION STATEMENT**

The Community Dialog on Gang Activity & Revitalization consists of individuals concerned about the emergence of criminal gang activity in and around the Braddock District. The Dialog focuses in particular on the Heritage/Annandale area of the Braddock District.

Members of the Dialog will learn about how to recognize the root causes and signs of gang activity and what they can do to report it and assist with enforcement and prevention.

Dialog members will learn about and discuss existing and possible new intervention, prevention and enforcement efforts and how we can work within those existing networks to address gang activity.

Members of the Dialog will learn about and discuss revitalization initiatives that can strengthen families and communities and better equip them to maintain safe and vital neighborhoods.

Members of the Dialog who have participated in at least four of the five Dialog sessions will adopt a slate of specific recommendations for addressing the emergence of gang activity in the Heritage/Annandale area of the Braddock District. Those recommendations will be shared with the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, the School Board, state and federal legislators, and community organizations.